

Read for more information on LGBTQ+ rights in Australia, race and ethnicity, religious diversity, and women's rights

LGBTQ+ in Australia

‘There is no good and bad, just difference, and that difference is okay.’

Australia is recognised as one of the most LGBTQI+-accepting countries in the world. British colonialism outlawed same-sex relations between men (but not between women), with execution applicable until 1890. This law started to change until 1949, when the last state (Victoria) reduced the death penalty to life-imprisonment for homosexual acts. The process of decriminalising male homosexuality took until 1997, when Tasmania became the last Australian state to change its laws. Since 2008, people in same-sex relationships have been afforded the same legal rights in relation to tax, social security and other aspects of Australian law. Same-sex marriage has been legal since 2017, after a postal opinion vote concluded most Australians support the recognition of this right.

Nowadays, LGBTQI+ people are widely accepted, especially amongst university students, where gender is experienced and accepted more fluidly than ever before. The majority of LGBTQI+ people ‘come out’ between the ages of 18-21, which makes university a vibrant space full of support and resources. Most universities have specific LGBTQI+ groups offering safe forums for advocacy and support in self-expression and networking. These groups also provide advice and resources.

Beyond university, all Australian cities celebrate LGBTQI+ culture with festivals and events. Most famously, Sydney’s annual Mardi Gras festival is world-class, culminating in its colourful parade and adding to Sydney being recognised as the most LGBTQI- friendly city in Australia. In addition to major events, there are cafes, publications, websites and dating apps specific to LGBTQI+ groups. The community is alive and thriving! Check out Minus18- Australia’s largest networking service run by and for LGBTQI youth for a fantastic Australian LGBTQI+ resource.

Race and Ethnicity in Australia

Australia boasts a vibrant, multicultural society, which has developed during specific periods of its history. First and foremost, we are home to the world’s oldest continuous culture. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are indigenous to Australia and possess unique artistic, musical and spiritual customs. They are not one group, but comprise hundreds of groups that have their own distinct set of languages, histories and cultural traditions. Colonisation or white settlement was established in 1788 when the British arrived to establish a 'penal colony' in the new land. During the century that followed, the British established other colonies on the continent and European explorers ventured into its interior. The majority of migrants during these early years were from Great Britain and small areas of Europe.

After WW1, Australia's migration dramatically increased particularly from Europeans displaced during that time and again after WW2. This was on the back of a ‘White Australia Policy’ regarding immigration, designed to limit non-British migration to Australia. More recently however, a large proportion of Australia's migrants are from the Asian region, with

China surpassing Great Britain as Australia's primary source of permanent migrants. Assimilation of new migrants to Australia does take time, as the current Australian communities learn tolerance and understanding of these new cultures.

There have been critical steps since British occupation (often too slow) that frame the public policy for indigenous people in Australia. The 1967 Referendum where Australians voted overwhelmingly to amend the Constitution to make laws for Aboriginal people; the Mabo Case in the 1980/90's that recognised aboriginal land rights and more recently when the Federal Parliament issued a formal apology to the indigenous people for the Stolen Generation. Today prior to any formal meeting or presentation, we pay respect to our indigenous people, both past and present, by acknowledging they are the true custodians of our land.

Today, Australians identify with more than 270 ancestries. Since 1945, almost seven million people (around 30% of Australia's population today) have migrated to Australia and this rich cultural diversity is one of our greatest strengths and is central to our national identity. This identity includes an emphasis on both physical and mental achievement, which is why challenging yourself at sport is so very important to our culture. The concept of 'mateship' is also an integral component of the Australian identity, as is 'larrikinism', 'slang' language, cuisine and humour. The history of Australian comedy and our distinct Aussie humour, reflects the country's convict origins and our (somewhat) politically incorrect sense of humour.

Unlike other societies, Australia inherited no specific cuisine in the traditional sense. As the country is a 'melting pot' of cultures, Australia's history with food is very 'dynamic' and a reflection of our multicultural heritage combined with the abundance of natural resources. If you're eating out, expect to taste a fusion of cuisines, particularly from South East Asia, as they are our nearest neighbours. Don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone and try various foods in Australia, as it provides a tangible experience to our multicultural history. Yummy.....

Women's Rights in Australia

According to the Australian Human Rights Commission, "Women's rights are human rights". Australia has long been an international leader on equality and women's empowerment but there is still work to be done on achieving gender equality. In 1902, Australia became the second country to grant women the right to vote in federal elections and the first country to permit women to stand for parliament. This is one of the earliest examples of the movement towards gender equality in Australia. However, this did not include Indigenous women who were not given the right to vote until 1962. It wasn't until 1943 though that two women were elected to the Australian Parliament. Since then, a growing number of women have been elected to office and held high government positions. Most notably, Julia Gillard became Australia's first female Prime Minister in 2010. Her 2012 speech on misogyny and sexism is definitely worth a watch.

Today, women can still face violence, discrimination, barriers to leadership roles and gender pay gaps. The Sex Discrimination Act 1984 protects people from unfair treatment based on their sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, intersex status, marital or relationship status, pregnancy and breastfeeding. It also protects workers with family

responsibilities and makes sexual harassment against the law. The Australian Government Office for Women is currently focusing on strengthening women's economic security, supporting more women into leadership positions and ensuring that women and their children are safe from violence.

While the movement towards true gender equality is progressing, some of the most notable advancements have been found in the world of sports. This includes the creation of the Australian Football League Women's competition in 2016, the biggest pay rise in the history of women's sport in Australia for women's cricket and an equal share of revenue for both the men's and women's national soccer teams.

Universities in Australia have a wide range of resources and advocacy groups on site for students. These groups focus on varying topics including women's safety, support for harassment and violence, and academic and professional mentoring. You can usually find that most universities in Australia offer Women's and Gender Studies. There is also a noticeable increase in women participating in disciplines that in the past have been dominated by men including research, law, medicine and STEM.

Overall, Australia is a safe place for women, and they have the same rights as men including equal access to the law, education, employment and health care.

Religious Diversity in Australia

Australia is a secular country with a high degree of religious freedom and religious diversity, however religion is considered to be a definitive component of Australian society. For example, Australia maintains one of the highest concentrations of religious schools compared to other OECD countries.

Approximately 30% of all schools in Australia are affiliated with a religion (and 94% of their private schools).

Christianity is currently the most dominant religion with over 52% of Australians identifying with the faith but with a diverse migrant population, Australia has over 120 faiths including a large number of people who define themselves as atheists. More religious diversity was seen in Australia in the 1970s after the White Australia Policy was abolished and many non-European communities were able to confidently establish their communities and in turn their beliefs.

Australia's anti-discrimination laws allow for freedom of religious belief. This can especially be found on campus at universities where religious clubs and societies have a high representation.

There are many opportunities to find a community with a religious affiliation as well as finding a place of worship that suits each individual. Studies have shown that many Australians, mainly Generation Z, are open to discussing religion and spirituality with their friends or peers which is a significant shift from older generations who do not feel as comfortable talking about the topic in public.

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion in Australia



The indigenous peoples of Australia, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have held a range of spiritual beliefs and practices for thousands of years with not one single Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander religion or spirituality. Traditional beliefs and practices vary significantly across different regions and nations with Australia. However, they generally share a common holistic view that highlights the reciprocal relationship and interconnectedness between people, landforms, animals and other elements of natural landscapes.

Australia is a diverse and welcoming country no matter what religion and faith you follow. There are many opportunities on and off campus to find a community that best suits you.